

**“I have seen the destruction of the faith
and of knowledge”
The Fall of Constantinople in the Letters
of Enea Silvio Piccolomini**

István Puskás

University of Debrecen

We well remember how there was once a period in European historical thought when the ordering of past ages was linked to significant events of great political, social and cultural change, and in this way time and memory was organised as a grid of differences and similarities. Nowadays, we live with a different paradigm – we think of, feel, and therefore construct, the past in a such a way that we avoid sharply delineated periods, and although the experience of the other and of what is different is still seen in our relationship with the past, we observe the time that has been left behind us from a distance and preserve that distance, even though the similarities, the continuous transformations and the experience of change is already a part of that relationship.

So today we understand that one event or a concrete series of events does not fundamentally change the nature of things, cannot open a new chapter in the history of a community; however, it seems demonstrable that there have indeed been, and are, certain events whose effects on the passage of history can be felt and analysed, and which can influence the relationship that people (both individuals and the community) have with the world. The role of memory is currently an active theme of research and in part deals with this phenomenon, or more precisely, the way in which certain processes make their meaning and significance felt in the life of the community; how the organic elements of their self-characterisation and identity are created, and in this context, what role they play in the formation and manifestation of the external relationships of a given community.

Another important aspect of the subject we are researching is a range of questions which are currently very topical and relevant (and which are closely

linked to the theme mentioned above): research into the history of the relationships between Europe and other civilisations. This research also uncovers the kind of events which, even though they may not be able to change them, can significantly influence the relationship between the West and other civilisations. (Just to cite an example that is very close to our times, it is easy to see what effect the tragic events of the attack on the Twin Towers of 11th September 2001 had on the relationship between the West and the Muslim world.) It is natural that both questions have a close connection with the present, with our present situation, and help in our efforts to understand, construct and situate our own age and our own selves (and, of course, what is also at stake is what attitude we adopt when we observe the past).

We now see that the early modern age of the 15th–16th centuries was of crucial importance in the creation of Western identity, and in this process the cultural superpower of the age, Italy, played a particularly significant role. We can also see that the imperial expansion of the Ottoman Empire was a series of events that had a decisive role in moulding relationships in the human, political, social, economic and cultural spheres, and within this process, the capture of Constantinople in 1453 was especially significant. Wide-ranging research, especially regarding Italy, has been carried out in this field. Much work remains to be done.¹

¹ Some of the works dealing with research into the Turks and Italy, and with the multi-layered network of relationships between the East and Italy which were consulted while writing the present study are: Dorothy Margaret Vaughan, *Europe and the Turk*, New York, AMS Press, 1954; Paolo Preto, *Venezia e i turchi*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1975; Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994; Andrei Pippidi, *Visions of the Ottoman Word in Renaissance Europe*, New York, Columbia University press, 2013; Maria Pia Pedani, *Venezia porta d'Oriente*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2010; Andrea Zannini, *Venezia città aperta*, Venice, Marcianum Press, 2009; Giovanni Ricci, *I turchi alle porte*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2008; Idem, *Ossessione turca*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2002; Idem, *Appello al Turco. I confini infranti del Rinascimento*, Roma, Viella, 2011; Franco Cardini, *Europa e Islam: storia di un malinteso*, Roma / Bari, Laterza, 1999; *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Perception of Other*, eds. David R. Blanks – Michael Frassetto, New York, Palgrave-Macmillan, St. Martin's Press, 1999; Marina Formica, *Lo specchio turco*, Roma, Donzelli, 2012; *La rappresentazione dell'altro nei testi del Rinascimento*, ed. Sergio Zatti, Lucca, Maria Pacini Fazzi, 1998; Mustafa Soykut, *Image of the Turk in Italy*, Berlin, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2001; *Medieval perceptions of Islam*, ed. John Victor Tolan, Oxon-New York, Routledge, 1996; Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West. Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004; Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, Cambridge / London, Harvard University Press, 2008; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001; Ananya Jahanar Kabir – Deanne Williams, *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005; Roberto Mancini, *Infedeli*, Firenze, Nerbini, 2013.

This study will recount how, in the period immediately following the collapse of Byzantium, the conceptual ordering of the tragedy in Constantinople began in Italy; what context of understanding developed around this ordering, and we will do all this not with the help of the historical sciences, but rather adopt the methodology of literature studies. In other words, to concentrate on how the Constantinople narrative started to take shape, which linguistic-stylistic-cultural elements from contemporary communities were called upon to talk about the event, and then to (re)construct it linguistically. Therefore, this examination will position the event and give it functionality.

Of course, we must bear in mind that in the modern (national) sense Italy did not exist at this time, and although it had moved ahead of several other European communities in the creation of a national identity, in the mid 15th century this process was at an early stage, and indeed only really gathered speed in the 16th century. Consequently, we must be more precise, and not speak of the reception of the news of the fall of Byzantium in Italy, understanding Italy in the sense of a modern national cultural community (indeed we cannot even speak of an 'imagined community'); we must make clear the reaction(s) of which community/communities in Italy we are examining and discussing.

In the Italy of that time, which did not even exist in the imagination, there were several communities which, for various reasons and with various interests at stake, followed events in the Eastern Mediterranean area with particular interest. Let us add here, that it was indeed the threat felt from the Turks, and the continuous conflict that erupted between the Ottoman Empire and Italy, as well as Italian participation in the international system involved in the wars against the Turks that played an important role in the early development of Italian national identity in the 15th–16th centuries, and especially after the Council of Trent.² It was precisely the mobilisation against the Turks which allowed a united stand to be taken by the Italian states which operated within a complex political system; the Turks were the external point of reference against which Italy could feel, interpret, and present itself as a united country.

² This approach is shared by Formica, and used in his work cited above, when he discusses the image of the Turks as the basic model of a relationship with the alien, and analyses the history of its development in the early modern period from the second half of the 16th century to the second half of the seventeenth. He also shares Benedict Anderson's view of the story of the development of national identity in Europe, following which the present work also uses the concept of the imagined national community. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London-New York, Verso, 1986.

The cities with the leading roles in trading (and political) relationships in the region, especially Genoa and Venice, considered it a matter of existential importance to be informed and knowledgeable about the Eastern Mediterranean area. As the centre of Western Christendom, Rome (which had just returned physically to this role with its move back from Avignon after the Schism) was particularly attentive to the conflict between Eastern Christendom and the Muslim world. The leading cultural-intellectual centre of the age, Florence, also followed the events with great anxiety, seeing as a consequence of the conflict the Greek cultural sphere – the transmitter of the cultural inheritance of the ancient world – pushed to the edge of destruction. The varied interests and different attitudes were all linked by common feelings of mourning, sadness at the destruction and dejection caused by loss, and the anxiety that Turkish expansionism would not stop after this triumph. Rather, it would continue westwards and the Italian peninsula would be one of the possible locations where this threat would be felt.

In the context of this present study we will examine certain texts which can, in part, show the possible interpretations and explanations contained in the reports of the Fall of Byzantium, by reading with care and attention three key texts of the humanist discourse – Enea Silvio Piccolomini's letters devoted to this subject.³ Here, with the promise that we will later prove our assertions, we can anticipate our claim that in the first stage of the memory of the siege there was no single narrative; the different (textual) situations used the tale of the fall of the city in different ways and from different perspectives. Even though the basic attitude was similar, different accounts were created in different discourse frameworks.

In the West, and this includes Italy, the politically aware community did not first encounter the Ottoman Empire in 1453, nor first give it their attention at this time. News of the Fall of Constantinople did not arrive unexpectedly; it was much rather the verification and fulfilment of a fear which had been developing over several decades, and seemed to be the visible failure of all those attempts to halt the Turkish advance. The most important of these was undoubtedly the Council of Basle, Florence and Ferrara, called by Eugene IV in 1431, which sat in Florence between 1439 and 1442. The Church, both during this event and following it, thought and acted following the paradigm which

³ Piccolomini's letters are well known as important texts regarding the formation of the image of the Turks in the West, but researchers handle them more as historical sources. If they read them as literary ones, as Nancy Bisaha does in the work cited above, they leave gaps in the letters to be illuminated, some of which the present study attempts to fill.

had developed during the Middle Ages: with the idea of halting and sending back the threatening enemy with crusading campaigns. The defence of Byzantium was synonymous with the defence of Christendom. The Council of Florence, however, brought an important novelty into the network of relationships existing between the Ottoman Empire, Byzantium and the West (Italy). This Council built a closer and genuinely internal relationship with the Greek cultural inheritance of Byzantium, thanks to the circle of Florentine humanists. In the Italian usage, as we will see, Greeks lived in Byzantium and Byzantium was the land of the Greeks; it therefore became possible to encounter directly the important element of the culture of antiquity which had previously only been accessible indirectly through Latin. Florentine Neoplatonism could not have developed without the Neo-platonists of Byzantium, and would not have been able to influence the culture of the Renaissance with such elemental strength. Consequently, for the Florentine cultural elite the preservation of Byzantium meant the preservation of the last living space occupied by the culture of Ancient Greece. This was above all not a physical space, but rather a virtual one; the space of *humanae litterae*.

The trading republics of Genoa and Venice were much more practical and much less influenced by ideological considerations when conducting their relations with Byzantium (and we should also add, with the Ottomans). For them the primary interests were of an economic-political nature; the prosperity of the city, and the preservation of the trading positions which served as the basis of their power. There is clear evidence for this dating back centuries; it is sufficient to mention the Fourth Crusade (1202–1204) as an example. The political discourse, with its numerous players, did not represent such an inflexible position as that which derived from the cultural-religious perspectives, although the important role it played in the life of these cities led to the fact that through various channels (trading, diplomatic and military etc.) there was a continuous gathering of information and knowledge in relation to the East.

The debate about the East did not only depend on which state's perspectives and interests were active in its creation; these were also closely linked and strongly influenced by cultural-artistic and global perspectives. We can observe this in the example of the previously mentioned three cities, Rome, Florence and Venice. Having discussed this theme, we will now turn to a subject which is relevant to our later analysis, the picture of the East developed in Humanism before 1453.⁴ For this intellectual community there were two

⁴ Of the literature cited above on the picture of the East formed in humanist discourse,

basic traditions available to construct their relationship with the East (as in all other areas, too): on the one hand the memories inherited from the Middle Ages, and, on the other, the newly discovered inheritance of Antiquity understood and analysed in the context of the present. The Medieval Christian tradition viewed the East (both Byzantium and the Muslim world) as the other from a religious perspective, which meant that the expression of difference, but alien, hostile perspective did not represent a radical, irreconcilable opposition. The supremacy of the West was only of a religious nature, and not based on culture. This brought with it the possibility that the disappearance of religious differences and the return of the other to the true belief would also mean the end of the hierarchical difference.

Humanism radically rewrites this relationship by constructing the Muslim-Christian relationship as an Eastern-Western relationship; in other words, by setting it on cultural foundations, and in this way creating the basis of the paradigm of Western superiority. As in so many other cases, this element of the humanistic discourse can be traced back to Petrarch.⁵ When Petrarch articulates this relationship in the *humanae litterae* context, he follows the same process as are involved in the creation of other constructs: he imitates the cultural model of the antique Latin language. This implies not only transposing the words and rhetorical devices; since it follows that these are regularly accompanied by the meanings related to them. In Sonnet 28 of the *Canzoniere*, which deals with a call to a crusade, the argumentation strategy is built, on the one hand using the example of the traditional figure of Charlemagne, who in this context features as a leader of a crusade, and at the same time, the heir to the Roman Empire; whereas, on the other hand, and linked to this, argues through the Roman narrative, by applying the model of confrontation between the civilised and the barbarian, even though this expression is not explicitly used. The text is dominated by the dichotomy between here and there, us and them, the West and the East, thereby dividing the world into two confrontational communities; the structure of which affords the “we” - the West - the higher position. It is worth noting the definition of the West

the outstanding works are: N. Bisaha, *Creating East and West...*, *op. cit.*; M. Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, *op. cit.*

⁵ Petrarch's viewpoint on the East is most effectively summarised by Nancy Bisaha, “Petrarch's Vision of the Muslim and Byzantine East”, *Speculum*, 76, 2001, p. 284-314; for the picture of the Turks which developed from the early humanist period with Petrarch, see: N. Bisaha, *Creating East and West...*, *op. cit.*, p. 43-93. The present work supplements her reading with a careful re-reading of the relevant key text, Sonnet n°. 28 from the *Canzoniere*.

is based and made visible on a geographical-religious basis, while from other perspectives this territorial and religious unit is very varied:

varie di lingue e d'arme e de le gonne⁶

Opposed to this is the other, the "them", who have chosen the wrong religion:

Turchi, Arabi e Caldei
con tutti quei che speran nelli Dei⁷

Let us point out that here Petrarch applies a conception common in medieval literature according to which Islam is a polytheistic religion, wherein it is not Allah, but three figures that are worshipped, known traditionally as: Maometto/Macometto/Macone, Trivigante/Termagante/Tervagante and Apollo. However, cultural differences are also made visible in this relationship; they have already become an object of separation, in that they have become an undifferentiated group confronting "us":

popolo ignudo, paventoso e lento,
che ferro mai non strigne,
ma tutti colpi suoi commette al vento.⁸

From the perspective of the construction of cultural difference the last phrase is particularly interesting, referring as it does to the military tactics, i.e. to the community (the Muslims) which never fight with iron, i.e. swords, but who entrust their blows to the wind, i.e. to arrows. This, according to the medieval notions of knightly ethics is a 'barbarous', unethical way of fighting, since knights match their strength, their bravery, their belief and the virtue of their ability with each other through direct body-to-body, physical contact with the sword.⁹

⁶ Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Piero Cudini, Milano, Garzanti, 1974, p. 36.

⁷ F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁸ F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁹ This construction follows from Petrarch's argumentation, and is, we might say, an innovation compared to the previous traditional approach, of which the chivalric romance can be a good example. Also related to the current theme is the corpus which deals with the Carolingian epos, wherein the Moors are viewed as no different to the Europeans in their style of fighting. On this, see my articles: "Mohamed a sisakforgón. (A korai észak-italiai lovagregények iszlám-képe)" [Mohammed on the Helmet Plume. The Image of Islam in the Early North-Italian Chivalric Novels], In: *Eruditio, virtus et Constantia*, Tanulmányok a 70 éves Bitskey István tiszteletére [Treatises in Honour of the 70th Birthday of István Bitskey], vol. I., Debrecen, 2011,

This is the point in history when the ideology of the West was born in Europe, which defined itself as having greater value and higher status in comparison to the East. It is therefore important to note that at this point this imagined cultural hierarchy was not as yet linked to political power and dominance – Edward Said's later orientalism – and to the Western episteme known as colonialism which followed in its tracks. The 16th century victories against the Turks and the concurrent development of colonies would see an intensification of those motivating factors which would encourage the West to transform its cultural superiority into political power and to make its presence felt physically and by action.

Petrarch did no more than to position the East as a topic for the humanist discourse; it remained unarticulated. For those who dealt with the theme in later years, however, the model was ready and allowed them to build their own constructions upon it.

The debate over the East intensified in the circle of Italian humanists after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The first chapter of this debate – and the one which was of decisive significance from the perspective of later authors – comprised the news and the commentary on the siege and the sacking of the city which followed it. The news of the fall of the Byzantine capital naturally travelled quickly to the most important (most closely affected) political centres, followed by more detailed reports from the survivors (depending on who they were and according to the function they filled). The reports known today¹⁰ were part of the discourse between those active in the political-cultural elite, and it is this fact to which we owe their survival. In what follows we will provide some examples of how this happened and we will attempt to find answers in our later research to the question of how this knowledge took shape in the wider community.

Before we take a more detailed look at the letters of Piccolomini, a bishop and secretary, let us consider for a moment those texts which can serve as a context; i.e. from which texts did the Italian elite form their picture of the

p. 434-439; Gloria Alaire, "Noble Saracen or Muslim Enemy? The Changing Image of the Saracen in Late Medieval Italian Literature", In: *Western Views of Islam...*, *op. cit.*, p. 173-184.

¹⁰ The sources and reports on the fall of the city which are recognised today were collected in one work by Agostino Pertusi, with an introductory chapter classifying the sources and discussing the circumstances surrounding their composition and their circulation from a historiographical perspective. The studies on the sources below were published by him, and the dating of the texts and information relating to the biographies of the authors is also from here. *La caduta di Costantinopoli. Le testimonianze dei contemporanei*, ed. Agostino Pertusi, Milano, Mondadori, 1976 (2012); *La caduta di Costantinopoli. L'eco nel mondo*, ed. Agostino Pertusi, Milano, Mondadori, 1976 (2007).

siege? Letters were sent in a more or less rapid form, either from the survivors of the events or those who had followed them from a close distance, addressed either to prominent figures in the church or to members of the state administration. The context of the letters is clearly indicated by the language chosen: they were all composed in Latin, or, if they were originally written in Greek, they were translated into Latin later on; in other words they were part of the discourse of the politico-cultural elite. We know of two texts linked to Venice, which were not written as letters, and not in Latin, but in Italian (to be more precise, in the dialect of Veneto). One was an official report prepared for the city leaders, which is now lost, or hidden; the author (or more accurately, the authors) of the other text possibly intended it for a wider audience.

The feature shared by both the Latin letters and the Venetian reports is that they do not deal explicitly with an analysis of the events, but concentrate on reporting them. This is so even though all similar types of report – given their constructed character – carry within themselves an act of interpretation, and we must not forget that the concept of reporting events was understood very differently than it is today (we will see concrete examples of this later). The loss, the feeling of a tragic shock experienced following the loss, and calls to immediate counter action are all present, as are comments contextualising the enemy, but no statements are made, no opinion offered concerning the political consequences, nor the cultural or religious aspects of the fall.

The most interesting and more carefully prepared letters from the point of view of the positioning of the events discussed are the those of Isidor of Kiev, because, following humanist learning, he attaches introductory analytical notes to the texts he has edited, although after this he concentrates exclusively on the events themselves. As an example, we can cite the opening lines of a letter addressed to Pope Nicholas V, dated 6 July 1453:

Quamquam plurimo luctu doloreque impediari, santissime pater et beatissime domine, ex dolendo conflictu et gemenda amissione inclitiae urbis Constantinopolitanae, violenter et crudeliter obsessae et captae ab impissimo Teucrorum rabido principe et christiani nominis acerrimo persecutore, attamen sane intelligens non lamentationibus et lacrimis fieri posse tanti dampni restau rationem et tam nephandae crudelitatis convenientem et debitam punitionem, hinc est quod ad te beatissimum petrem, Jhesu Christi vicarium, cui vis et potestas ab ipso domino Jhesu Christo collata est in terris, recurrere oportet; et licet ad omnes christianas potentias spectet tanti sceleris ultio, tuae Beatitudinis principaliter dignoscitur interesse, cui cura gravis comissa est: "debet enim pastor bonus animam suam ponere pro ovibus suis".¹¹

¹¹ *La caduta di Costantinopoli. Le testimonianze dei contemporanei, op. cit.*, p. 59.

Isidor of Kiev did not witness the siege at first hand, but was staying nearby and within a short time he passed the news he received in various Greek letters on to leading and influential personalities such as Cardinal Bessarion or the Pope, Nicholas V. Isidor had previously had an important post in the Church at Byzantium, and this involved important diplomatic tasks. He therefore was one of the leading figures in the Council of Basle-Ferrara-Florence, and a believer in the unification of the Eastern and Western Church, so he nurtured good relations with the leading figures of the 'Latin' Church. On 26 October 1452 he was a member of the Papal Delegation dealing with the unification of the two churches which had met in the Basilica of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. After the fall of the city, in the autumn of 1453 he sailed to Italy, landing in Venice and died there in 1463.

Leonardo, the Bishop of Militene was also a supporter of the unification of the two churches, knew Isidor well, and was also present on 26 October 1452 in Hagia Sofia. He was born in the Genoan colony on the island of Kios, and finished his studies in Italy, where he entered the Dominican Order; however, he maintained close relations with humanist circles. He was present in Constantinople during the siege, and was taken captive, but somehow managed to reach Kios, where he described the fall of the city to Pope Nicholas V in a letter dated 13 August 1453. His report is perhaps the most comprehensive of the age, and Italian and Greek translations were made of it; this report has become widely known because of: its authority (from an eye-witness), the addressee (the Pope), and the fact that it could be incorporated into the humanist discourse. Five years later Leonardo travelled to Italy as the envoy of the ruler of Kios, Nicola Gattusi, in order to gather help to defend against a possible Turkish attack. He died in Genoa in 1459.

In addition to the church figures and officials with their humanist cultural background, there were other less educated eye-witnesses belonging to the state-political elite who also sent home reports; here, we will discuss them briefly in order to give a picture of the variety of sources.

One text from the corpus of letters related to the siege later became widely known. This text was not originally a humanist letter and was subject to numerous revisions before it attained its current form. Jacopo Tedaldi, the Florentine trader, fought within the walls of Constantinople during the siege, and was one of the few Italians who, when the Turks forced their way into the city, were able to swim to the safety of the Venetian ships as they were unfurling their sails to depart. They reached Negropont safe and sound. He recounted his experiences to the Frenchman Jean Blanchin, who probably

translated it into French later on, and gave it to a certain Jean (Giovanni?) Colombi. Colombi was possibly the person who re-edited the report and sent it on to the Bishop of Avignon. This text then began to be used as an important piece of propaganda following the Pope's announcement of a crusade on 30 September 1453. At the end of the 1460s the Latin version was re-edited as a letter, and became an important element in the recollection of the siege, under the title *Tractatus de expugnatione urbis Constantinopoli*.

The Venetian Ludovico (Alvise) Diedo commanded the fleet that managed to navigate safely away from the city to Negropont. When he returned to his native city he recounted the events in front of the city dignitaries, as well as preparing a written report. This document has since been lost or is lying somewhere undiscovered, but was obviously an important and authentic source of news at the time.

Of reports written by the eye-witnesses who survived the siege current research considers the most important to be the *Giornale dell'assedio di Constantinopoli* produced by the Venetian doctor Nicoló Barbaro, which was recorded in diary form between 2 March 1451 and 29 May 1453, but which seems, from the manuscript itself, to have acquired its final form in Venice in 1454. The background of the text and its subsequent history are hard to establish, but it clearly shows that Venice and Venetian survivors played an important role in communicating the events. Barbaro, who wrote the text in Italian, or to be more accurate in the common written language of Venice, had the clearly expressed aim of providing and sharing information, not analysis.

...se possa ben intendere particolarmente a che modo la fo prexa, dirò prima dove prozesse la vera del Turco a Griexi, e poi ordenatamente intenderete tutte le battaje fatte a zorno a zorno.¹²

From the linguistic register employed, and the later genre linked to it (the 'giornale'), it is evident that it was intended for wide distribution in his native environment of Venice, and this is how it was received.

One important element of the text, which sets out to be accurate and credible, is not without factual contradictions. For example, it mentions the Genoan betrayal, in which they informed Sultan Mehmed of the plans of the Venetian forces. The question, of course, is how credible this statement is; whether it was part of the political games played between the two cities, or whether it was pure malice against an old rival. What is perhaps more

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

interesting than the credibility of the reports about the Venetian-Genoan conflict is that the writer positions himself as part of the narrative by placing Venice as a participant; which in Italy, to an Italian reading public, begins to operate as an element within the country's political discourse. The interests of Barbaro and of Venice openly demand that the efforts to defend and save Constantinople be shown as heroic and of the greatest value. This demand presented a good opportunity to criticise the rival Genoa and to raise an accusation of treachery. This process obviously served to strengthen his own community, which was finding its own unity by the existence of the other, and helped to salvage and justify, if not to lessen, the tragic feelings accompanying the lost battle ('we did everything we could, but the tragedy was caused by hostile forces outside our control').

The accusation of treachery laid against the Genoans does not appear only with Barbaro; it was part of a more general effort to reconstruct events. We can also find in the group of texts mentioned above one which attempts to deny it. For example, one of the letters reveals that Isidor of Kiev, written two years after the event to the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good (III), was considering the idea of a crusading campaign to the East. The letter was probably written with the intention of supporting the validity of the idea, the need for such an enterprise, and the plan itself; perhaps, it was with the intention that by involving Genoa he was trying to clarify the role of that city in the siege (since of the great Italian sea power Genoa was closest to Burgundy). It is worth noting Isidor's explanation in the face of the accusations; according to him they only appeared to be dealing with the Turks while they really were helping the defenders and this was all part of the tactical plan agreed upon with the Imperial Byzantine Council.

Nam cum pauci essemus, diu rem bellicam, quoad veluimus, gessimus, nec deerant nobis Ianuenses, qui omni conatu Urbem ipsam tutati sunt, et quamquam simulatu cun Teucro viverent hocque fieret statuto consilio, tatem noctu clam ad nos eos quos valebant ac poterant viros et sci subsidia mittebant frequentique senatu imparatorio aderant aliisque cum antionibus reipublicae tutandae consultabant.¹³

According to Isidor, the common explanation of the treachery committed by Pera's Genoan community was that they wanted to protect themselves, but the fate of the colony (its destruction) was clear evidence that they had not come to an agreement with the enemy.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

If, however, we turn to reports written from a Genoan perspective, we find no trace of popular "gossip"; the city positions itself unambiguously in the Christian camp, which made no approach to the enemy; on the contrary, they steadfastly shared the Christians' common, tragic fate. The podesta of Pera, the governor Angelo Giovanni Lomellino, sent a report in letter form to Genoa after he managed to escape from the occupied colony. The letter, dated 23 June, and thus the earliest known communication appearing in Latin was not a text prepared for the humanist community, but composed to inform the rulers of the native city of the tragic events. One of the key elements of Lomellino's narrative was the emphasis of loss, and of what sacrifices the Genoan colony had made in the defence of the city. It is perhaps worth noting the report by Nicol  Soderini the Florentine ambassador, who in August reported that according to the news arriving from the port city, the majority of the Genoans remaining in the pillaged colony of Pera had converted to Islam en masse in the hope of receiving better treatment at the hands of their conquerors.¹⁴

There is a group of writings in the corpus of the contemporary humanist texts dealing with the fall of Constantinople, the three Latin letters of Enea Silvio Piccolomini,¹⁵ which are not significant for reporting the events, but rather because they analyse and seek to contextualise them. It may well be that these texts appeared precisely at the same time (two in July, one in September) as several of the writings referred to above, which were a first reaction to the tragic shock and fear of the event. What really makes his letters particularly interesting is that they do not undertake to present the events, but to analyse them. As a result of his work, it was not just the interpretation of the fall of the city into Ottoman hands (the role that it played and the significance it took on) that was communicated to a wider public, but the formation of a relationship between the East and West; and it is thanks to this that the letters also had a great influence in creating a Western identity.

A decisive factor in the respect accorded to the letters – besides the obvious quality of the text – was the author himself. Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who wore the Papal tiara as Pius II between 1458 and 1469, was one of the key figures in the creation of the humanist culture of the fifteenth century and the

¹⁴ Petrusi provides the source of the information, and also quotes from Soderini's letter, *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁵ In reading the texts I have used Petrusi's edition, and taken the data relating to the circumstances of their composition from him as well. *La caduta di Costantinopoli. L'eco nel mondo*, *op. cit.*, p. 40-67.

political life of the age. In addition to the position he occupied in the humanist community, an important concern for him was to propagate his political views on the Turks and to get those views published.

The future Pope was, in 1453, one of the most influential figures in the church (having been bishop of both Sienna and Trieste) and was residing in Graz as secretary to Friedrich III the Holy Roman Emperor. He first received news of the tragic events about Constantinople not from Italian sources, but via news to the Imperial Court from Serbia (and it was also received later from Venice).

Piccolomini chose the epistle as an important tool in both humanist communication and the publication of the *humanae litterae*; the aim of which was not just that it be delivered to the addressees, but would also become part of the general discourse and achieve wider circulation there. Given that the addressees had differing relationships with the author, and also that their social status was different as was their relation to the events, the Imperial Secretary provided a perspective which was adjusted to the concrete situation. In order to achieve different aims he used different arguments, and always in dealing with the Turkish question he did not only make political statements, nor just describe strategic issues, but examined cultural relations as well. The political content of Piccolomini's letters have long-since lost their topicality, but in their image of the Turks and in the constructed relationship between the Turks and the West to which it is linked, we can still recognise a living, operating attitude. There are three different reported situations, but behind them is a coherent opinion and perspective on the world which can be reconstructed from the three texts as a whole.

The first letter, dated 12 July, was addressed to Pope Nicholas V himself, and Piccolomini's objective was to urge and mobilise for an immediate reaction to events. The letter, with its masterly use of language, opens with words of shock and striking images of loss, in order to create an effect on the reader to make space for the recommendations which would follow, and then demonstrate how absolutely necessary they are. Because the author assumes that the reader already knows about the events, these are only presented briefly, and the sources of the news – the messengers arriving from Serbia, who, as Byzantine citizens, are considered to be authoritative and credible sources – are given as a point of reference. In these opening lines Constantinople is presented to the reader as the Imperial capital (the letter also discuss the tragic fates of the ruler and his heir: the first falling and the second being taken captive), and also as one of the sacred sites of Christianity, equal in its importance and role to Rome. To make the reader aware of the destruction he describes pillaging of church buildings, although not as a fact, but as a fear.

Turchos autem in ecclesias Dei saevituros quis dubitet? Doleo templum illud toto terrarum orbe famosissimum Sophiae vel destrui vel pollui; doleo infinitas sanctorum basilicas opere mirando constructas vel ruinae vel spurcitiae Mahumethi subiacere.¹⁶

The pillaging of church buildings, although in Piccolomini not a certain fact, is a recurring element in the narrative of destruction. The reason for this is that for Westerners and strangers, who were not from the city, these buildings, significant from a religious and cultic point of view, were the ones that registered with them. What it is in a city that is visible to an outsider's eye is related to how he or she understands and analyses the place in question. In this sense the medieval descriptions of Rome serve as a good reference point; they list the wonders of the city, which are first and foremost also church buildings and those connected with the faith. Rome, and also Constantinople were, to the contemporary European, above all church centres and even though their ancient heritage could be seen, it was only mentioned in as much as it was relevant for a Christian visitor. Rome, as a point of reference, is clearly referred to in Piccolomini's letter.

Roma quoque post suam conditionem in anno 1164 per Gothorum regem Athlaritum direpta refertur. Sed hic ne templa sanctorum violaerntur edixit.¹⁷

While Alaric, the conqueror of Rome, spared the holy sites,¹⁸ the Turks would certainly not be so merciful. This aspect of difference and comparison, functioned as a way of creating the feeling of loss, but also served as a way of describing and characterising the Turks. While the Goths were eventually able to integrate into the West, for this to have happened there had to have been some common ground, and on their part there had to be a degree of respect and tolerance, however little. The Turks had no respect for the conquered, they considered them of no worth, they lacked the minimum common feeling; their difference was radical and total.

As a humanist the bishop supplements the list of losses with a further element important to the learned community: the spiritual heritage of the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁸ Nancy Bisaha discusses the humanist topos of the Goth-Turk parallel in the work cited above, N. Bisaha, *Creating East and West...*, *op. cit.*, p. 69-71. In her opinion this parallel image played an important role in establishing the Turk-barbarian similarity. In our present work we attempt to show that in addition to Piccolomini this was an already active topos and he reinterpreted it.

ancient world, with the destruction of ancient texts.¹⁹ The sin committed by the Turks is not just the pillaging of a holy city and the offence against the Christian faith, but also the fact that the West has been excluded from an important source of knowledge. With the fall of Constantinople and the intrusion of foreigners a treasure of inestimable value has been lost to the culture of the *humanae litterae*. What is more, it falls prey to the Turks at precisely the point when it seems to be within easy reach, having successfully survived the previous millennia.

Quid de libris dicam, qui illic erant innumerabiles, nondum Latini cogniti? Heu, quot nunc magnorum nomina virorum peribunt? Secunda mors Homero est, secundus Platoni obitus. Ubi nunc philosophorum aut poetarum ingenia requiremus? Exinctus est fons musarum.²⁰

The Church, the faith and human knowledge have all suffered an irreplaceable loss:

Video simul et fedem et doctrinam deleri.²¹

After all this the Pope, who in the humanist understanding of his role is protector not just of the faith and the church but Western civilisation as well, must at all costs speak out and act. What is interesting, however, is the argument the author of the letter uses to further encourage the Holy Father: it is not only to please God, nor for winning his grace which would be the prize, but the remembrance by the human community, who, besides other significant acts, will remember him for forcing the Turks out of Constantinople. In addition to living on in memory, a short term and easily gained reward awaits the victors: if we approach the problem from the perspective of current politics, of power, then with the expulsion of the Turks the West's dominance of the Christian world will be unquestioned, and it will be absolutely clear that from then on Rome will be the sole ruler of Christendom. From this, and from the second letter, it seems that following the paradigm of previous crusades, Piccolomini's thinking was that organising and leading the war was the

¹⁹ This typical humanist viewpoint also interestingly appears in a lament, which 'answered' the need for an expression and interpretation of the events among the wider social classes. It is true, and probably not accidental, that in a variant prepared for the Florentine public there is no trace of the parts written in the Veneto dialect. This question will be dealt with in more detail in our forthcoming study on the Constantinople laments.

²⁰ *La caduta di Costantinopoli. L'eco nel mondo, op. cit.*, p. 46.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Pope's task, and only in this way was it possible to ensure that the other leaders would put aside their individual points of view and conflicting interests, and that the Christian West would act in unison. (This also appears to be the justification for the Pope's latter/late? activity.)

Nam scriptores omnes, qui apud Latinos Romanorum pontificum gesta referent, cum ad vestrum tempus fuerit ventum, in hanc sententiam de vestra gloria scribent: Nicolaus quintus natione Tuscus sedit annis tot; patrimonium ecclesiae ex tyrannorum manuum vendicavit, divisam ecclesiam unioni reddidit...²²

Reputation and living on in the memory of posterity was for the humanist discourse not just a question of vanity; there was much more at stake: the useful and lasting product which action would bring about would give human beings the dignity to live on in the memory of future generations. The method of living on in the memory was for a man to save something of himself after death, in order to rise above mortality, above the most tragic aspect of being human. The greatest and most memorable act of Nicholas would be the liberation of the patrimony of the church and with this the possibility of reuniting the divided church. Piccolomini, following the thinking that underlies the discourse of humanism, considered that humanists and the art of humanae litterae had the task of engraving events into memory by conceptualising writing as a tool and medium of memory.

The second letter, dated 20 July, was addressed to Nicola di Cruces, the Cardinal of San Pietro in Vincoli, the Bishop of Brixen, and its subject was also the crusade which should be immediately organised. Piccolomini sets pen to paper specifically to convince the senior church figure of the need for military action, and that the Pope should be at the head of the army. (Neither the letter to Nicholas, nor the one to the cardinal discusses the points of view of the imperial court, whether the Emperor intends to initiate a crusade, or even joining one.) The arguments of the letter are similar to the letter to the Pope on many points: according to the text, with the fall of Constantinople Christendom has also lost its Eastern capital, which was both the last bastion of Greek culture and an irreplaceable link for the West with the admired past. On this point the Bishop of Siena goes into more detail, mentioning not just the widely known Plato (but not Homer), but a list of other authors, perhaps because he knew the Cardinal was a more educated humanist, or at least assumed as much in the context of the given (textual) situation:

²² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Inde nobis Plato redditus, inde Aristotelis, Demosthenis, Xenophontis, Thuchididis, Basilii, Dionisii, Origenis et aliorum multa Latinis opera diebus nostris manifestata sunt, multa quoque in futurum manifestanda sperabamus.²³

From this perspective the loss makes the parallel between Constantinople and Athens even stronger, since for ancient Rome, Athens was the place where Greek culture was encountered, studied, preserved and handed down. Constantinople filled the same role for contemporaries. He continues this parallel by citing the ancients' custom of studying on Greek soil in order to complete one's education as an essential element of acquiring a humanistic education. The actual space where the *humanae litterae* could meet the world of ancient Greece had been lost. The form the text took was determined by which arguments were judged to be effective in convincing the recipient of the letter; in the letter addressed to the Pope it was those related to the discourse of politics and power (the parallel with Alaric), while here it was a humanist argument.

That this letter also had a political objective is clear from the following argument: action must be taken as soon as possible because the Turks will not stop at Byzantium, but will continue their pressure westwards. If they conquer Albania, this will represent a direct threat to Italy, since after the fall of Durazzo, Brindisi, which lies opposite it, will be next. It is interesting that at this point Piccolomini was not thinking of a further advance onto the Italian peninsula on dry land, but rather emphasises that this move would lock Venice up in the Adriatic and thus the Genoan-Catalan fleet would be insufficient to meet the Turkish navy. Whatever Piccolomini was really thinking, there is always the idea that the fight against Turks can only be taken up with the widest possible solidarity. And in relation to Venice, let us note that although the letter mentions the Serbian refugees as the source of the news of the siege, on July 20 he is already reporting that in Venice they are mourning their losses; not the siege itself, but rather the damage caused during the clashes to the Venetian-Genoan-Catalan fleet sent to rescue and assist Constantinople. His position in relation to Venice probably arises from the fact that news had been received from the Serenissima after the first letter was written.

The description of a possible Turkish advance is an excellent indication of how accurately the Emperor's secretary judged the situation. For us, however, the really interesting part of the letter is where he provides reasons as to why events would certainly take this course. The starting point is the detailed description of the cruelty of the Turks in Constantinople, the intention of which

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

is obviously to create the strongest possible emotional effect, because the firmer the foundation provided for the ideas presented later, the more convincing they will be. Piccolomini argues at this point that the Turks will not stop their horrific pillaging (therefore the West can expect to meet a similar fate if it does not act) because they are a people with a radically different culture. It is not just that their religion is totally different, but that Christian culture, which is alien to them, is so irritating that they want to destroy it with fire and iron.

After he has sketched out the religious differences, he goes further and shows the unbridgeable gap between the cultural otherness he has described, with the irreconcilable opposition it gives rise to. At this point Piccolomini introduces a perspective which, although it does not diverge from the episteme of the Middle Ages, is radically different from his contemporary world. The relationship between the medieval and Muslim world (and the same is true for Italian humanism right up to the end of the 16th century) was not sensitive to cultural difference. The Carolingian version of the chivalric epic, which I referred to earlier, clearly shows that the Muslims, although erring in matters of faith, were not characterised by cultural Otherness; the Muslim world was part of the world of the epic and was not repositioned from "us" to "them". The question is how much of this was poetically-dramaturgically "forced", an interpretation brought about by the internal logic of the chivalric romance, and how much it was a general practice? The chivalric romance did not consider those of different religion to be lower status "barbarians", and if the foreigner accepted his error and converted to the true faith he became a full member of the knightly community. Any possibility for integration completely disappeared in the context of marked cultural differences.

To articulate this new perspective and relationship, Piccolomini made use of the knowledge taken from ancient authors:²⁴

Nunc sub Turchorum imperio secus eveniet, saevissimorum hominum, bonorum morum atque literarum hostium. Non enim, ut quidam rentur, Teucris sunt neque persae, qui nunc Turchi dicuntur. Schitarum ex media barbarie genus profectum est, quod ultra Euxinum Pirricheusque montes ad Oceanum septentrionalem sedes prius habuisse traditur, ut Ethico philosopho placet. Gens ignominiosa et incognita, fornicaria in cunctis stuprorum (!) generibus, lupanarium cultrix, quae aghominabilia quaequae comedit, ignara vini, frumenti atque salis... In libidinem provolunt sunt, litterarum studia parvi faciunt, incredibili fastu sueribunt...

²⁴ Nancy Bisaha has carefully uncovered the ancient models for the use of the barbarian topos by the humanists in her work cited above, *Creating East and West...*, *op. cit.*, p. 44-50.

So this learning justified the positions taken: the Turks are the enemy of all the values (these were understood as literature, education, the transfer of learning and the medium of the transmission of values for the humanist discourse) which were fundamental to Christianity and the West. However, the cultural difference is deeper than this, indeed it is a different way of living.

One element which was considered part of the mental, cultural difference was cruelty, the way in which the Turks dealt with the defeated. Contemporary Italy did not recognise a brutal, cruel practice of war, nor the extent of the damage and harm inflicted upon the civil population and property which was described by Piccolomini in his letter. Anyone who behaved in this way, was alien to an Italian citizen, especially to humanists, and moreover, an alien to be despised and feared. Of course, at this point questions arise of how true, how factual these conceptions were, and how much of it was a rhetorical technique to achieve a desired effect?

An important point in the quotation above is the clarification of the origin of the Turks. In this schema they do not belong to those peoples outside Europe who are recognised as legitimate cultures by the Christian West. When the Turks stepped into the West's field of vision, and began to inspire fear, two opinions formed regarding their origin; some traced them back to the Persians, and others to the Trojans (since these were the two famous empire-building peoples which confronted Westerners in the world they knew beyond the Greeks). This also reinforces the characteristic of the medieval period mentioned above, whereby there was an attempt to integrate alien peoples appearing in the West's field of vision into its own world, rather than see them as other, at least on the level of narrative. Piccolomini here confronts this theory and "expels" the Turks to the periphery, to the barbarian world, the zone outside culture: the land of the Scythians.

This idea did not first emerge in this letter, it was simply that here there was an opportunity (it was considered apposite) to present it in detail: in the letter to the Pope the Turks are consistently called the Turchi. The previously mentioned contemporary sources named them as Teucric, which was a reference to the fact that the Turkish-Trojan genealogy was the most widespread explanatory relationship at the time.²⁵ For Piccolomini this way of thinking was not just a rhetorical flourish in the composition of this letter, but an expression of the values and argumentation supporting the intention of the text, of which

²⁵ On the development of the Trojan-Turk theory in the Middle Ages see: Sándor Eckhardt, "La Légende de l'origine troyenne des Turcs", *Körösi Csoma Archivum*, 2, 1926–1932, p. 422–433

the separation of the Turks from the civilised world was an important element – his other, specifically academic works also express the same point of view. Although in his earlier works he also used the expression *Teucrici*.²⁶ Thanks to his study of sources from the ancient world, he chose the Scythian origin theory instead of the Trojan version commonly held since the medieval period. This choice provided his most comprehensive presentation of the theory in his work now known more commonly under the title of *Cosmographia*. In the two geographical texts (i.e. a description of the world on the basis of what was known by contemporary Europeans), originally known as *De Asia* and *De Europa*, for which Piccolomini used as sources ancient works dealing with the same themes, he applied the information he had acquired to the Turks. He arrived at the theory of a Scythian origin based on the knowledge that the contemporary settlement territory of the Scythians was adjacent to the former settlement area of the Ottoman Turks.

It seems that Francesco Filelfo came to the same conclusion completely independently. In a speech given in 1459 urging Francesco Sforza to take part in a crusade he too spoke of a Scythian-Turk genealogy, also on the basis of geographical arguments, which he knew from the work entitled *De origine Turcarum* by Theodorus Gaza, a Greek humanist translator of Aristotle who was active at the court of Pope Nicholas. Today it is difficult to reconstruct whether the Scythian-Turk theory did not also occur outside the process of textual imitation in the humanist community, i.e. whether or not a non-textual transfer of knowledge can or cannot be demonstrated with the help of philological methods. What is certain is that Piccolomini soon became a highly respected representative of this theory. Evidence for this is that in 1456 Nicholas Sagundius, a humanist of Greek origin, dedicated his study entitled *Liber de familia Autumanorum id est Turchorum* to Piccolomini.

Piccolomini's theory, following Petrarch, was an important contribution allowing the West to lay a new basis for its relations with the Turks; looking beyond the self-awareness of humanism, the ideology of Western supremacy is not just imagined (as with Petrarch) but developed. In relation to itself the new perspective positions the other as valueless, placing it on a lower level in the hierarchy, with a different view of the world from the culture which Western humanism considers its own and the only one of worth. Setting up a hierarchy involving the alien, the other, was naturally a feature present in medieval Europe (since each culture considers the familiar in comparison to

²⁶ This point is taken from N. Bisaha, *Creating East and West...*, *op. cit.* p. 89.

the unfamiliar); however, in the Christian episteme (as in the example of the chivalric romance mentioned above) diversity was ordered as part of the unity established by God for the whole created world. Of course, medieval man was sensitive to the variety of human societies and cultures, but did not attach to this a hierarchical relationship.²⁷

With this development the discourse of humanism took another path, and from this point of view Piccolomini's text is of the utmost importance because by expressing difference using the linguistic articulation of ancient authors he takes it out of the metaphysical context (since in the Christian context the language for achieving this did not exist as a model to refer to) and places it in a space where there is no integrating force lying behind difference and otherness.

The third letter is dated two months later, and just like the previous ones, is part of Piccolomini's political activity. Here the addressee was Siena's ambassador to Venice, Leonardo Benvoglianti, and the letter is part of the continuous agreements and exchange of information between the two Sienese citizens. From the letter we can conclude that Piccolomini received information from the ambassador about the public mood in Venice and the reaction to the tragic events, then placed it all within the developing situation at the Imperial court (mentioning that at the Imperial Council he had relayed the news received from Benvoglianti about Venice) and reinforced it with his own opinion about what political steps would be necessary, including the fears he had about the obstacles in taking these steps. The Imperial court and the Emperor himself understood the gravity of these events and saw the impending danger if the Turks were to continue their advance westwards on their own, leaving neither himself, nor the Pope able to take up the struggle. Here Piccolomini shares his idea of the great Christian co-operative effort as the only effective reaction to the situation.

His by now familiar political position was supported by a new argument. This is particularly interesting because it is a conception that research and posterity commonly believe only appeared later in the Protestant German Turcica literature: the interpretation being that the Turks were seen as a tool of divine punishment upon Christianity which had left the path ordained by God. The Christians greatest sin was the inability to unite, and instead to

²⁷ Although after stating this we must also immediately deny it, or rather qualify it, since recent research has shown that the mediaeval period was also able to create a dialogue which imagined hierarchy; but, and obviously this was no accident, not in the Mediterranean area where the heritage of the Roman Empire had, over the millennia, existed in close symbiosis and interaction with the people of the most varied cultures.

follow selfish individual interests rather than those of the community; in other words, to put current political designs above the defence of Christianity.

Authoritative German (and Hungarian) research considers that in humanist discourse the relationship with the Turks and its articulation occurred in the context of the renaissance of ancient rhetoric, culture, and knowledge; that the Turks were understood, and indeed defined, on the basis of this culture. However, the Turks as a divine punishment from God was a view held within the Protestant world picture, and featured as a cardinal element.²⁸ As we have seen it is indeed true that the humanist age broke from the previous cultural picture of the Turks, and reordered it using the framework provided by the language taken from ancient authors; this is particularly interesting in the context of Piccolomini's letter, because a good half century before Luther he had already worked out this position in some detail. Of course in the discourse of the Reformation and in the confrontation with the Catholic Church this question of sin would find a different explanation, but the basic structure itself was already present in this letter.

Here it would not be wise to draw any conclusions as to what kind of relationship there might be between the two connected ideas, but it is perhaps worth noting that Piccolomini wrote this letter while living at the court of the German Emperor, and it is easy to assume that he supported the idea of common action; he expressed this elsewhere and to others, so it is reasonable to suppose that this idea would continue to be expressed in the German community.

The argument used to express the theory starts from realpolitik observations, that the inability to create any solidarity was simply playing into the hands of the Turks:

Omnes Turchi procuratore sumus, Mahumetho viam omnes preparamus; dum imperare singuli volumus, omnes imperium amitemus. De proprio commodo sumus anxii, rei publicae nulla cura est, privatis affectibus inservimus.²⁹

²⁸ As an example we will cite what Mihály Imre notes about the Italian humanists' understanding of the Turks in relation to the topos of the complaint of Hungary: "Although those who expressed it in literary form never forget how terrible an ideological enemy is the Turk for Christendom, with whom every possibility of compromise is excluded, this basic fact is very often placed in parenthesis and this terrible enemy is conceived of as *only of worldly significance*. In its appearance and historical role and in the chances involved in the continuing struggle against it does not take on a transcendent role, as a great Burden for Christendom." Imre Mihály, "Magyarország panasza". *A Querela Hungariae toposz a xvi–xvii. század irodalmában* [The Querela Hungariae Topos in 16th–17th Century Literature], Debrecen, Csokonai Kiadó, 1995, p. 100.

²⁹ *La caduta di Costantinopoli. L'eco nel mondo*, op. cit., p. 62.

In the Christian world view it follows that straying onto the wrong path brings with it some consequences, and so punishment is to be expected. At this point Piccolomini is expressing the usual medieval Christian opinion, in that the Turks are not positioned as outsiders; he understands the Turks not as existing on the humanist horizon but on the Christian horizon, as part of the Order of things and subservient to God's will.

Quare si facta nostra rect pensare merito mais infestum esse debere quam Turchis. Ille deceptus ei, quem prophetam esse credit, obsequitur; nos scientes mandata divina negligimus.³⁰

The Turk strays beyond the divine order and intentions, but he is part of that order. He miscalculates the situation and misjudges his own role (he considers himself a prophet), but the sin of the Christians is more serious, and now they are in a position to be judged because they have acted incorrectly, and because they are in possession of the knowledge needed to act for the good. The first is an error, the second a sin. The sanction against the sin will necessarily follow and the Turks will be the tool. Acting as a tool does not absolve their actions, but it does make them acceptable.

Quid mirum, si furor Domini supra nos excitatus Turchum elevat et inimici gladium super cervices nostras extendit? In leges divinas impie agere impune non cedit.³¹

Piccolomini uses the narrative of the Turks being a divine punishment as a part of the humanist apparatus of argument and persuasion, but in this particular letter it is not the only tool used to convince the reader of how important it is for the West to unite to defend itself against the present threat. In Piccolomini's use of language, from the perspective of the West – of the Latin community – the Turkish threat is also genuinely important (and a similar reference was made in the letter written to the Pope) because the reaction to this challenge can produce some kind of united community. Confronted with the 'other' the internal differences lose their significance, and it was precisely the Turks who brought about a situation in which the West can consider itself a community. This can be seen in the systematic use of the word 'Latin' with the meaning of West.

The letter written to Benvoglienti does not stop at the expression of the idea of divine punishment, but employs further arguments. A key point of this

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

letter is to show the extent of the destruction, and to clearly depict the cruelty of the Turks. What is missing, however, is the humanist point of view; he does not emphasise the destruction of knowledge, since the addressee is probably not part of this community and would not understand that argument and so it would not achieve the desired effect. Instead, Piccolomini constructs a picture of the cruel, merciless enemy, with the obvious intention of ensuring that fear provokes strength and a readiness to act. What is worthy of note here too, is the choice of linguistic devices, the emphasis on the bestiality of the Turks, and the use of a few epithets and episodes to exclude the enemy from the cultural community.

Aiunt, qui praesentes fuere, spurchissimus illum Turchorum ducem, sive ut aptius loquar, terribiliam bestiam apud summam aram sanctae Sophiae propalam videntibus omnibus nobilissimam virginem ac eius adolescentem regalis sanguinis construparasse ad deinde necari iussisse.³²

The horrifying episode is given credibility by the authenticity of the sources, and as such stands out from among the typical mediaeval examples. Of course it is another question whether it was not just a rhetorical turn to create a feeling of authority, or whether the exemplum style of discourse was in operation in this present report. This is because the objective was the same as in the exemplum, which was intended to convince the other emotionally, but which was also built upon reality. The letter to the Bishop of Brixen also discussed the cruel behaviour of the Turks, but there it was expressed in generalities, and the image depicted was of a massacred, humiliated people.

Another report on the siege dates from this year, but probably after the date of Piccolomini's letter. This was also in letter form, describing the same episode. The Venetian governor of Corfu, Filippo da Rimini wrote to one of his colleagues in the Venetian administration, Francesco Barbaro, and included a report of the terrible fate meted out to the virgins of Byzantium.

Victoria tumens Teucrorum rex (...) celeberrimum Sophiae fanum profanandum (...) ibi immitis bestia ab mmiti virgine pudorem extorquens gloriatus se tum ultum Torianae virginis vicem in templo Palladis defloratae.³³

³² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³³ I have taken this quote from the historical work, *Siege and Fall of Constantinople in 1453*, which gives a detailed list of the sources for the siege which are currently known. Marios Philippides – Walter K. Hanak, *Siege and Fall of Constantinople in 1453*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2011, p. 38.

The recently published work on the siege of Constantinople which quotes this letter considers this part of the text important because it is the beginning of the mythological treatment of the siege and the incorporation of unreal events.³⁴ This analysis is an excellent example of the change in the reading context which has occurred since the modern age. It may well be that this text or texts really did give birth to the creation of a mythical picture of the events, but the reason for the incorporation of fictive events was different. The reason is that in the culture of alterity, there is a radically different relationship to what happened, to the truth, to the visual-allegorical discourse and to the communication of knowledge-experience related to it, indeed to language (and to reality). We can understand the place and role of the episode quoted in the context of the operating mechanism of the exemplum. What is essential in the example is not that it is a credible event, because it really happened, but because of the lesson it teaches and the message it conveys. The aim is not to provide an objective record of fact in the modern sense, but to convince the reader or recipient of the truth of the statement, so consequently a good example is not the truth, but truth-seeming. All the same, we cannot call it a case of explicit myth-making. I believe the task is not to raise the siege into mythical (textual) space, although it may be that those coming after will give it this interpretation; in our case, barely two weeks after the loss of Constantinople, it operates more as a move to contextualise and understand. The argument, or statement, in favour of the truth (Argumentation) as a convincing element of discourse, and as one of the most important operating processes exemplifying these intentions and processes, enjoyed authority from several sources: its use was reinforced both by the existence of the Christian exemplum, and also by the recommendations of ancient rhetoric (and of course, historically the two are organically linked).

Both Filippo da Rimini and Piccolomini tell this story in order to use the example to characterise the Turkish conquerors and also – by depicting the bestially cruel, radically different, alien enemy – to prove to the recipient what difference there was between “us” and “them”.

The episode is not only interesting from the point of view of the role of the Turks, or the narrative related to the Turks, or as a report on the Turks. Both reporters knew from the practice of the mediaeval exemplum, that to move the community to action and to create a strong sense of cohesion, it was

³⁴ “... in his account we begin to detect the origin of tales that eventually spread throughout Europe, transforming the historical circumstances into tales, legends and myths.” *Ibid.*, p. 37.

important to bring them face to face with the suffering victim. Martyrdom, the physical torture of the body, suffering and the accurate or virtual demonstration of all these things (whether it be a textual or visual illustration) was an important cultural code, a source of community cohesion (and not only in the European alterity). Contemporary research on the subject has shown how important a direct witness of physical suffering was for the creation of community identity, during the course of which reactions of horror, shock, sympathy, mercy, empathy and identification played a role at one and the same time.³⁵ So the scene in which virginity is not respected does not just achieve an effect through its articulation of the bestiality of the Turks, nor simply illustrate the frightening and barbarian other, thereby creating a feeling of opposition to them, and inciting action; it uses the schema of the topos of martyrdom and the connotations and reflexes in the community which are related to it. This has as a final aim, of course, the presentation of a new argument to incite action against the enemy, but from different emotional and rational perspectives.

Both writers had similar intentions, but because of differences in their situations and educational backgrounds, we can find fundamental differences between them, such as the question of the genealogy of the Turks, which is more than a clarification of their origin; indeed, what is in question is not really this at all, but much more the integration of this origin into the cultural and educational discourse, into the world of the author (and the recipient). Francesco da Rimini places the story in the previously discussed 'traditional' Turco-Trojan context, as is shown not just by the use of the name Teurci, but also by the fact that he understands the siege as an act of revenge, and explains the events in this way. Once again, this cannot simply be described as myth-making; according to the contemporary episteme, the author, and the text, did not create myths, but wove the events and the object – the community presented – into the fabric of culture. At the same time, it is worth noting, that it wasn't the differences of religion or faith which caused the conflict, or the cultural differences as we saw in Piccolomini's earlier approach. Francesco da Rimini follows the mediaeval model more closely, in that he positions and contextualises the capture of Constantinople in the framework of the

³⁵ "Because pain so powerfully solicits spectators' engagement, aestheticised physical suffering plays a vital role in creating communities of sentiment and consolidating social memory, which in turn shapes the cultural and political realities that causes spectators to respond..." Marla Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain. Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics, and Artists*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2010, p. 2.

historical narrative (of Troy) which is both familiar and considered as part of the culture. The consequence of this is that in positioning the image of the other, there is less difference between “us” and “them” than with Piccolomini, who, on the contrary, tries to increase it and so ‘finds’ ancient sources on which to base his thesis of cultural difference and to justify it.

Viewed from the perspective of classical philology, it is obvious that the following question arises: who was imitating whom, and was there a common source? Given the chronological facts, the most likely response is that either there was a common source, or perhaps that Francesco da Rimini was somehow aware of Piccolomini’s episode (maybe through Venetian informers), and used it for his own interpretation. What I consider more essential than a clarification of the relationship between the texts, is that we can show at this point how the narrative reformulation of the historical events worked, with what goals and intentions the authors introduced them, and in no way can we speak of a discourse which was uniform and shared one point of view. This can be instructive in forming an appropriate approach to Piccolomini’s letters. The fact that he set his opinions down on paper and introduced them into the humanist discourse does not mean that he automatically rejected other interpretations – neither in his own narrower circle, nor in the various groups in Italy who were culturally, educationally and politically well-informed.